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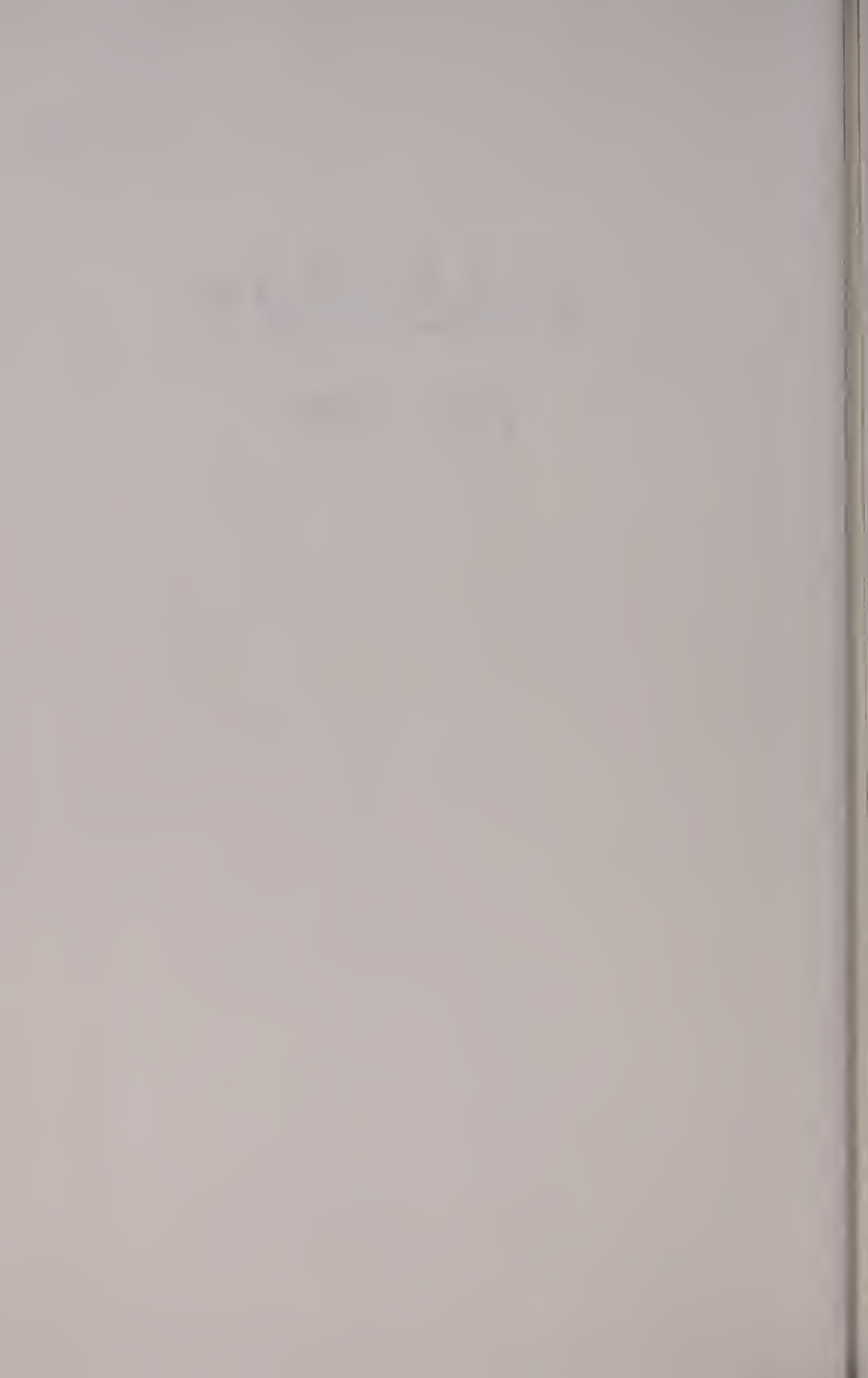




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CALVERT

Fall 1987



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CORRECTION: "To my husband who left me" by Nancy O'Donnell was incorrectly credited to Lillian Frankel in the Contents. Calvert apologizes to the artists.

Orange Towels

(for Barry and the *Pride of Baltimore*)

I sit reading James Wright's *This Journey*
and the dawn sun dispels the clear night air
of Thurmont, MD at a touch,
reveals the golden haze of pollen
that drifts above the uncut mountain fields.
In a glint of light off the rainwater
pond behind me, I see you,
the yellow shimmer of your Sunfish on the Potomac
tacking sharply across the wind,
the striped nylon sail straining,
the daggerboard out of the water and
showing beneath the hull
until you must flip over
and come up sputtering hip deep in water
because you never could swim,
ready to go out and do it again.
When we made it home to our duplex that evening
you took a shower and
laughed about your murky bath.
We talked about tomorrow.
I still have the orange towels you used that night,
the ones you bought to brighten up the bathroom
but left behind when you moved away, brother.

A neighbor's black cat visits me
for the third time since 5:30, eyes green as life,
insisting on his strokes in a way a man can't
from a stranger, or often from a friend,
nudging my arm while I try to write notes,
rolling on his back when he thinks he has my attention;
I pet him.

A dozen hands heave at the lines
to drop the too-full sails
that are bursting, one after the other.
The spreading white lines of the
bow surge are lost in the rising white caps,
the spume-soaked wooden deck
disappears beneath swell after swell,
a gray-silver spray hangs over the ship,
blinds the horizon beyond the sudden squall.
As you stood, grasping hemp and hardwood rail,
I know you smiled at the waves on your knees,
the wind on your face trying to knock you down
because it's what you lived for
and I know you kept smiling
until the astonishment hit your face
with the sea water
and the thought of which wind
to sail next was gone.

Backs

But I do like women on their backs,
the way curves of hip, stomach and breast
pour out of the bed and fill my hands,
the way hair splays on the pillow
and forms rivulets for light to flow down,
the arc of cheek
against the shadow of neck
and the eyes that take me down when they open
into arms and legs that bind me.
I know this, and I know
that my back fits the bed too,
or the back of another man.

The thrust of his chest
slopes flat down stomach
to legs that tense as a finger draws
along the muscle of one inner thigh
and relax
after the torso arches up to touch torso,
hand furrowing hair,
lips touching lips
to trace a line to the shoulder
that relents, tingling at the pressure.
Her lips,
if I don't remember.

812 N. Jackson Street

Of course, it had to rain today,
harder than it has in months,
and the electric fireplace log
in the foyer of the funeral home

does nothing to the wet November chill.
The viewing room holds more relatives than
I've seen together since your 80th birthday,
the surprise party where some of them got together

and bought you a console TV with remote control
to make it easier for you to watch your programs.
For you, the biggest surprise was my father's presence,
his coming to see his ex-mother-in-law at his

ex-wife's house because he liked you too much to miss it.
You cried when he hugged you.
Today, he arrives at the last minute
and walking up to you, my mother crying

and leading him by the arm,
he agrees that you look peaceful.
The flowers do not move.
The cushioned lid is closed.

The cars file out of the parking lot,
lights touching lights in an unbroken string,
and I'm amazed at how efficiently
the Arlington police block off the succeeding intersections.

It makes me think of the words just
spoken by the pastor,
who had met you only once.
She kept saying that you were just

making another passage, one in a long line.
The procession passes a block from your house.
I remember being young there,
your hushing "Uncle" Stewart for telling bad jokes

and complaining about his cigars,
Uncle David playing Beethoven for you
on the baby grand in the parlor,
teaching me *Happy Birthday* and *Chopsticks*.

From upstairs, I can smell your homemade beef stew
thick with potatoes and carrots
and I rush to the top of the dark stairwell,
wanting to leap from there,

feel myself float past each of the twenty-odd steps
as they seem to fall away beneath me
the closer I come to the bottom;
I think you must have felt that way there

when you were young.
We pass the church where I was baptized,
three blocks from Aunt Pat's and Uncle John's.
It isn't much farther now.

Eight grandchildren pair off and grasp the handles of your casket.
The feel of the wood reminds me of your
cool, worn hands, smooth and hard from
sweeping the sidewalk and arthritis.

You told me of how your hands were soft,
how in the '20's you went to every dance
at the University of Maryland and had your
choice of the men, dancing all evening

and then riding home, gazing at the face
of the "Gibson girl" in the face of the moon,
the only one as beautiful as yours.
You went dancing until midnight

with mother, Sahah and me just last year.
After waiting in the rain until everyone could see,
we carry you through the mud,
set you down on the straps.

The prayer said, everyone stands and waits,
watches for minutes in silence
for something to happen,
someone to say a word, or two.

No one does.

Your house is too quiet for all the people
who are here, talking. In the kitchen,
the buffet spread out on the
old wood table is barely touched.

David, just up this morning from the half-way house
in Richmond, drifts through the crowded rooms,
silent, lost; I think he senses, too,
that they have washed away your scent

in cleaning the house, as gone now as the odor
of Stewart's cigars. I find that
I prefer the front porch, where I can
see the swing on which we used to sit

and glide while we waited for someone to come
and pick me up, made our small deals:
no Hallmark cards to be sent between us,
but a short phone call now and then,

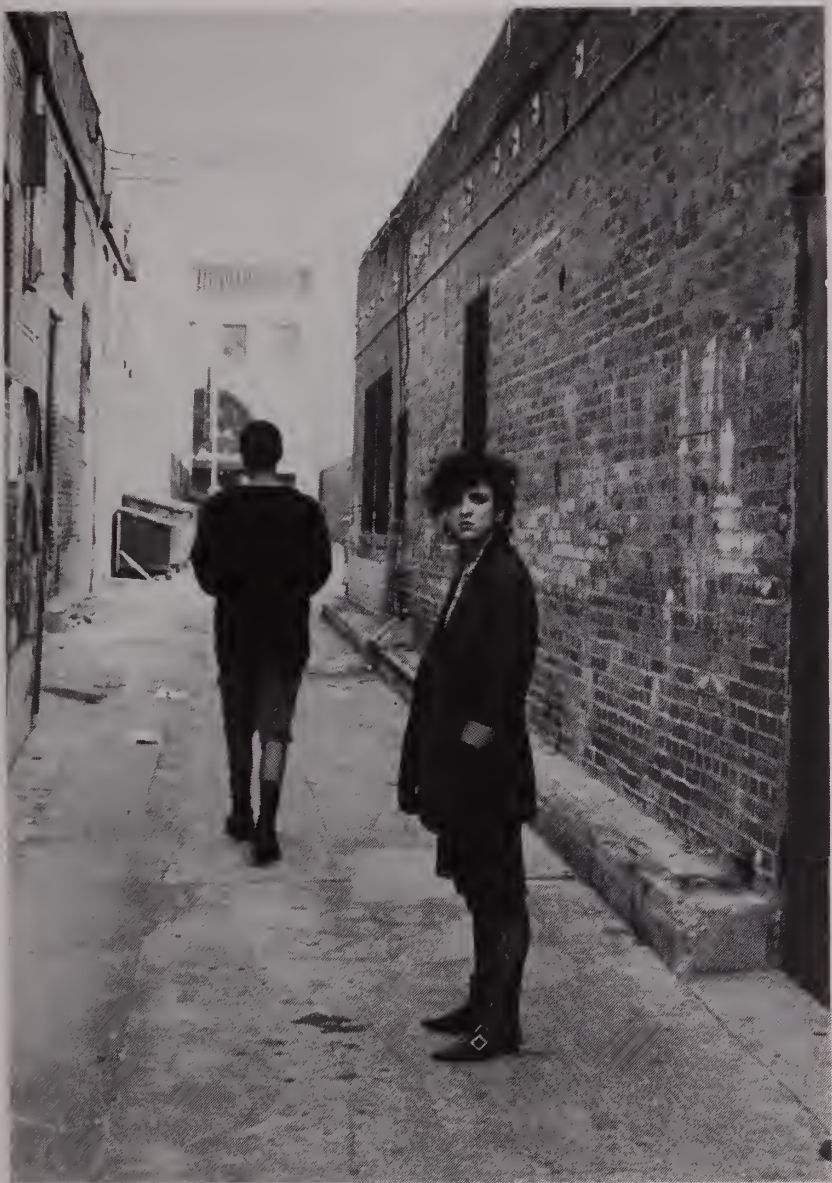
and I was to pass on my old, worn tube socks
every fall to help you keep your feet warm.
Other people couldn't believe it,
but you and I understood.

That morning you woke at six instead of four
and didn't turn on your radio, in the silence
after breakfast, reaching to clear the dishes,
you fell across the old kitchen table and that was all.









Antioch

The afternoon I found you
I also found Antioch
A murderous city in celebration,
Half way sprawled on a grey foothill, far off.
It overlooks a blank.
Whirlwinds, issue of Hephestus' anvil;
Filings fallen from heaven substantiate the empty wind,
Then gyrate across the plains,
Collide cross wires,
Before the gates.

Pauline Borghese

— for Janet

To classicize her, to drape her
in the grand past, Canova chipped
in marble his statue of Napoleon's sister.
She is beautiful, lying on two heavy pillows,
draped with thick cloth gathering
into folds, breasts, the tumbling V
of the rib cage, the sweet odor of flesh.
When I lie in bed and study you
under the white sheets, which leave your back
to viewing, your pale shoulders
to touching, I think what it must be like
to have known Canova, as his son,
or servant, to have trespassed
into his studio, from the back—alone—
catching his *Venus* asleep to breaths.

Swimming

The last thing I want Jimmy to think is that I've been crying over his getting home three hours late from work. It's not as if I've been crying all that much but enough so that Jimmy can tell, and I hate the way he gets when he thinks he's made me cry. Bigheaded. So, at nine thirty, when I see his car pull into the parking lot below our apartment building, I rush into the bathroom and splash cold water on my face. Then I pat my face dry with a towel and look at it closely in the mirror. My eyes are still pretty red from crying but there's not much I can do about that.

I hear Jimmy bang into the apartment and call my name. I run my fingers through my hair and trudge out of the bathroom into the living room. Jimmy is already bent over his record collection which he keeps in crates along one wall of the room. He leaves his coat and his shoes on the floor next to the door and reads right for his records. Can't go a minute without music. Now he chooses a record which I can't see but it wouldn't matter if I could because Jimmy never asks my opinion. I never have one. All the music he listens to sounds like one dull noise to me.

"Hi, Jimmy," I say.

"Wait a minute, Anna." Jimmy carefully lets the record slide from the jacket and places it on the stereo, only touching the rim with the tips of his fingers. He is always careful with his records. Handles them as if they are made out of tissue. He is never careful about anything else. Only records.

Jimmy places the needle on the record and sits back and sighs as if he has just performed surgery. When the music starts, Jimmy springs up and swings around. "Hey, there, sweetie pie," he says. He bounds over to where I am standing, takes hold of my shoulders, leans over and gives me a kiss. He is much taller than I am and has to bend way down to look straight at me. "What you been up to?" he wants to know.

"Nothing much," I tell him.

Jimmy grins. He has a tiny grin and tiny blue eyes that peer out at the

world beneath a whole lot of curly blond hair. He always has this sneaky look on his face as if he has just discovered an embarrassing secret about you and will never let on what it is. Now he is peering down at me but not grinning. In fact he is starting to frown.

"What's the matter?" I ask.

"What's the matter with you?"

"Nothing. Why?"

"You look funny," Jimmy says. "You've been upset about something?"

"No, of course not," I say. I pull away from him and walk into the kitchen. I try and look as if I am thinking of something to eat."

Jimmy leans against the doorway.

"I only just got home," I tell him.

"Oh, really?"

"Yeah. Walked in about two minutes before you did."

"What were you doing?" he asks.

I open the refrigerator and squint inside. Then I say, "I went swimming." I close the refrigerator and turn and face him.

"You were what?" Jimmy peers at me through tiny, tiny slits of eyes.

"Swimming. Haven't you ever heard of a person swimming before?"

"Sure," Jimmy says, "but not you."

"Well, you don't know everything about me."

"I know a lot about you. And, anyway, where was this you went swimming?" Jimmy folds his arms. He looks as if he intends to get to the bottom of this.

"At the Y," I say. "Where else does a person go swimming in the middle of November? I mean if I had my choice, I'd swim in a lake or the ocean. Pools have so much chlorine. It irritates my eyes. They must be bloodshot." I lean towards him, tilting up my head. "They're bloodshot aren't they?" I open my eyes wide.

"Yeah, they look a little red," Jimmy says.

"That's chlorine for you." I look around the kitchen and bite my bottom lip. "Guess I'm not as hungry as I thought I was," I say, shrugging. Pushing past Jimmy, I stamp into the living room and throw myself on the sofa as if I cannot believe how exhausted I am from all the exercise I got tonight.

Jimmy just stares at me. I can tell that he doesn't know what to make of this swimming business. He is much happier if he can think that my eyes are red from crying over his being late. Then he can mess up my

hair, tell me I'm silly, because don't I know it's silly to cry? Even sillier to worry? When you start worrying and sticking to schedules, you're no longer any fun to be with, Jimmy says. And we moved in together to have fun, didn't we? What do I want to do? Drag him down? Make him act like a boring grownup?

But Jimmy can't say things like that if he doesn't know I've been crying. After awhile he just says, "Well," and lopes over, plopping down on the olive green armchair next to the sofa I'm on. "Guess where I've been," he says.

"I don't really care," I say.

"Sure you do. It's not like you were worried or anything." Jimmy leans over and tugs the end of my hair. I push his hand away. "Come on. Don't you want to know? I know you'll get a kick out of it."

"Will you just tell me then, if it means that much to you," I say.

"I'll give you a hint," Jimmy says. "Bingo!"

I look over at him. "What do you mean, Bingo?"

"That's the hint."

"What kind of hint is that?"

"That's what you say when you're doing what I was doing tonight."

"So what kind of hint is that?"

"I was playing Bingo and when you win, you call out Bingo!"

I sit up and gape at him. "That's the stupidest thing I ever heard," I say.

"What, playing Bingo?"

"I mean using Bingo as a hint when that's exactly what you meant in the first place."

"Come on, Anna. Lighten up. Why are you acting so serious?"

I roll my eyes. "Because I left my childlike spirit at the Y jumping on the trampoline," I tell him.

"Oh, they have one of those? I love trampolines. My grandmother used to have one in her backyard. I used to love jumping on that thing. Could even do forward flips. Bet you never knew that about me."

"Hmph."

"Yeah, that was a great tramp but Grandma had to get rid of it when my kid brother fell off and broke his arm. I could have killed my brother for breaking his arm."

I lie back on the couch and pretend to be bored with this story. I don't see how Jimmy can come home three hours late and expect me to be interested in his stories.

"So can anyone go over ther and jump on that tramp?" Jimmy asks.

"How should I know?"

"Because you said you've jumped on it."

"I said my childlike spirit jumped on it. I was only being sarcastic."

"Boy, you're really up in arms tonight," Jimmy says. "Don't you even want to know what I won tonight playing Bingo?"

I shrug. Jimmy tells me anyway. "I won salt and pepper shakers shaped like chickens. Won them for being the first one to make an L on my Bingo card."

"An L?"

"Yeah, isn't that strange? I don't know what it stands for. Probably the name of the place this Bingo game was held or something like that."

"Well, where are they?"

"What?"

"The shakers."

"Oh, didn't I bring them in? They must be somewhere." Jimmy gets up and strides over to the door. "I wouldn't lose a prize like that." He picks his coat up off the floor and shakes it. Then he looks around him. "Must have left them in the car," he says. "Oh, well, it's no big deal." Jimmy strides back over and sits on the sofa with me, across my stretched-out legs. He may be tall but he's so thin he doesn't weigh much.

"It is a big deal," I say. "I want to see them."

"You'll see them tomorrow," Jimmy says.

"Why not now?" I ask.

Jimmy grabs one of my feet and squeezes it. "You silly. You'll see them tomorrow. We'll put them right on the table. Won't your parents get a kick out of that the next time they show up for dinner?" My parents have a habit of showing up whenever they feel like it. They think because we live together unmarried that we don't deserve the same kind of privacy married couples do.

"Why not now?" I ask again.

"Anna," Jimmy says, "You don't expect me to go running all the way down to my car now, do you?"

"All what way? Three stories?"

"I'll get them tomorrow. Don't be so impatient."

"Why not be impatient?" I want to know. "You want to be like children, right? Well, children are always impatient. Don't you know that? Children can't wait for anything. Santa Claus, recess, toys, people. Children go nuts waiting. Don't you even know the first thing about children?"

Jimmy plays with my toes, trying to get me to laugh. I don't. Instead I yank my foot away from his hand and squirm out from under his legs then spring off the sofa. "You don't even know the first thing about children, I say. "You just think they're all carefree, don't you? Happy go lucky. Don't you?" I stand in the middle of the room with my hands on my hips.

Jimmy giggles. He must think everything I do is some kind of joke. But I don't care right now. Usually I'd be pretty embarrassed but not right now. Now I have a point to make.

So I start storming around the room, looking everywhere but at him. "You only know what grownups think about children. That's what you know," I tell him. "And, furthermore, you say it's silly to worry but children worry. Constantly. About all kinds of things. They worry if there's monsters in their closets. Or if their teacher is really a witch. And they worry about wetting their pants in school. And not making any friends when they move to a new place. Stuff like that and more, I bet. More than grownups, I bet."

"Maybe they do," Jimmy says.

"I know they do. I was like that. I know all about being a child. I know more than you do about being a child."

"Oh, sure, I bet you do," says Jimmy.

"I'll prove it," I tell him, "I'll show you what a child would do. Now you'll see how children act." I look around the room and spot the stereo with Jimmy's record spinning around and around, cranking out that tuneless noise. It reminds me of the buzz the refrigerator makes that you hardly notice, but when you do it drives you insane. Everyone puts up with that kind of thing because you can't turn the refrigerator off. But children don't put up with stuff like that. I storm over to the stereo and yank the record off the turntable, the needle squeaking across the surface. "I hate this music," I blurt out. "Why should I listen to music I hate?"

Jimmy is up and next to me in less than a second, his hand clutching my arm. I hold the record flat between both of my hands and rub my fingers over the smooth black surface, pressing them into the lines between the songs. Jimmy stammers for a minute then starts demanding to know how I can be so mean. How I can ruin his record like that. And his needle--I've ruined that too. Don't I know how important his music is to him? Don't I care at all? And here he thought I loved him so much. Thought that's why we moved in together. Why else would he move in together?

I say nothing. I just squeeze the record between my two hands and watch the empty record player spin around and around. I don't know why Jimmy doesn't simply grab the record away from me. Probably worried about putting his hands on the surface. Even now, watching his record get ruined by someone else, Jimmy won't put his hands on the surface.

He's asking me if I really do love him. He asks me a few times before I shrug and say, "I don't know. I'm only a child. I don't know anything about love."

"You are not a child," Jimmy says. "You're twenty-three years old. You got me all wrong about this child stuff. You've blown my ideas way out of proportion."

I rub and rub the surface of the record with the palms of my hands, wondering if I have, in fact, blown his ideas way out of proportion. Or if I am just more childlike than he is. I say this. "It's just that I'm really more childlike than you."

"Childlike? I'd call it childish. This is childish, Anna, not childlike."

"Well, then I'm too childish to love you I guess."

Jimmy starts to say something then stops. He holds onto my arm as tight as he can and I think he is trying to say something that way. By holding on tight. He's not trying to hurt me. Jimmy can never hurt me. He's not strong enough. When we moved in here together, Jimmy needed help carrying things that I could have carried by myself. He wasn't afraid to ask either. So we carried everything up the three flights together. Boxes and the crates filled with records and all the old furniture we collected from relatives and friends. Everything. It took much longer than it would have if Jimmy were stronger. But we had all the time in the world. And we were so excited about moving in like this, together, like grownups, that it didn't matter how long it took. And what's more, we were sure when we moved in that we shared a secret about living. We thought we had it all figured out. Or Jimmy did, and I agreed with him. But I guess nobody ever really has things like that figured out. You just have to keep refiguring.

I have been staring at the turntable spinning silently and now I look up at Jimmy. He has also been staring at the turntable. Now he looks down at me. He is not grinning or frowning. He looks more like he has forgotten what we were doing. So I remind him by handing him the record. He lets go of my arm and takes it by the rim with the tips of his fingers. Then he leans over one of his crates, finds the right record jacket, and slides the record inside. He puts the whole thing back in the crate.

He stands back up. "It's ruined you know," he says. "It won't ever sound the same."

"Which do you care more about," I ask, "me or the record? Me or any of your records? Tell me, Jimmy, I have to know."

Jimmy peers down at me, his tiny mouth shut tightly, and I suddenly don't want him to answer. I don't want to hear what may change everything. I have this impulse to go lock myself in the bathroom and put my hands over my ears and sing really loudly, the way I did when I was a child and didn't want to hear my mother scold me.

But I don't. I take Jimmy's hand and wait for him to answer.

Jimmy looks at his records, then back at me. "You're asking me to choose between you and music?"

"Not choose," I tell him, "This isn't a choice. I just need to know which is more important. Which you care more about. Which you would stick your neck out for. I have every right to know that. We live together, you know, like married people. We have a commitment."

Then Jimmy takes his hand out of mine, shaking his head and saying, "Oh, no, no, no. We made that clear from the start. No commitments. That was clear, Anna. You agreed. You can't suddenly spring stuff like that on me. And you don't even know if you love me. No, we are not married. That's what we're not. I'm sorry, kiddo, but you can't go changing the rules."

Jimmy saunters over to the couch and sprawls out on it, putting one arm behind his head. He seems to think he's won now. Like he's set everthing straight. Now he's all bigheaded again. When he gets like this, I forget all the things about him that make me love him, the times when he's suddenly gentle and holds me in his arms as if he were afraid I might break. I forget the way he makes me laugh, and the fun we have doing everyday things: shopping for snow boots, arguing with mechanics, sitting at the dentist's office waiting for our mouths to numb. When he gets like this, all I see is this guy stuck in some kind of ideal world where he has everything his own way, where everything goes by his rules.

I walk over to the couch and look down at Jimmy. His curly hair spreads out all over the skinny arm he has his head against. He grins at me. I grin back and lean down close to his face, peering into his tiny eyes. Then I say, "When I grow up, I'm leaving you."

The Mutiny

It wasn't so long ago

She was the captain
and I was the ensign.

I was an extremely loyal officer.

She was two years older
so it was o.k., for her to have a higher rank.

I got to say things like
"WE GOT THEM NOW"

and

"DIRECT HIT"

but

I never got to give orders.

We always played together then.

She went to school and
brought a friend home and
made her the first officer
and

I said the enemy made a
hole in the side of the ship
and we were doomed

I fell on the grass and died
and she looked at me for
loyalty
but I stared at the sky.

It just wasn't the same after that.

Leaving

You are already there under a different
sky, your hair falling around you.

The woman with the scissors is not me:
she doesn't save a lock for her purse.

She speaks your language.

Maybe you have worked for her

and this is how she pays you.

Or maybe your hair is growing long again
and you braid it to keep it out of the way.

Don't go yet.

I still have places to show you.

There is a garden you must see and a

small circle of trees the afternoon sun turns
into a painting, as in a Vermeer:

the light green-gold and heavy, shining slant
in through a blue window, turned down to white
on the woman's hands.

But the peaches spilling from a bowl find

the color even through the glass

pulling it to their skins as softness, a blush.

And as the light, slipping through your fingers,
changes, like your hair gathered in my hands,
losing something in the moments, I try
to hold onto what little I have from you:

a small passport photo and a cloth
bracelet with a faded fish at the center
of it, and the shadows on my ceiling
at night that seem, somehow, to belong to you,
or to both of us. They push away the
boundaries of the room, deepening the space.

Screen

Trees twist like snakes cut into white linen,
lace bound around the edges by hand
a delicate stitch, a gold-tipped needle,
fingertips a seive pattern of pricks,
the blood painting brown strokes along the thread.

The landscape is weeping,
threads laid out on a tile floor
at the angle of rain.
The trees painted here look windblown.
Mountains rise above mountains
disconnected, their foundations hidden
by the mist floating off the heated land,

the bodies of warm animals
wet from the rain and running.
This world is a series of ink marks
delicately pulled
like the fingers of a girl

stroking the needles of a balsam
and bringing her fingers to her face, quietly,
to catch the hint of scent left on them.
And perhaps she gathers a handful
of the gold-brown pins and takes them home
to save in a little box, the ready scent of them
waiting under the lid.



Dulles at Night



Patrick's Dream

Marriage

Crissy asked if I would marry her: I said yes. She screamed and ran away. Marry. It sounded like a new game like alphabet or numbers, which she played with me. Schooling me for Kindergarten. She said I ran wrong. Swing your arms! she chimed. She made a collar of black paper and stapled it around my brother's neck. She bade him say, "til death do you part." She bade me say, I do. "I do." And Mom asked Crissy and her sister Kim to "have a picnic," in our backyard. There was a deep red sunset. It was nice. Crissy stole my bike, and rode across the street, down the dirt path, hidden in the bushes, until she pedaled around and around the building. I chased after her until I could run no further: I waited, at the edge of a corner, when she rolled by, I grabbed the oval loop, that supported the banana seat, and yanked. She kept going, but I held on, my knees dragged, covered in jeans, my arms flexed, until gradually, she slowed, her legs worn out, and came to a stop. She looked right at me and said: "Look at the red sun."

Remembering Sunday Morning

Pink altar flowers, like startles
of fingerpaint on white walls,
or a child's giggle in the space
between the sermon and the hymn;

petals, cupped small as hands
to catch our breath,
hold the hymns that brush over them
soft as lips, or as the lace

on your christening gown this morning,
when you fisted up such a spray
over your pink-squeezed face
you nearly could have baptized yourself;

wet buds here, even tonight,
when no light crosses your sleeping face: buds
like the kiss I'm sowing into the palm of your hand;
I close your fingertips around it.

Lullaby for the Never-born

Night in this room comes strange,
through disorganized glints of light
on the walls, sharp winds
that whistle in spasms
under the door, cracked places,
dark, raspy breaths.
Your cries touch me in this wild place,
howl up a dream

of another room, lined straight
with cabinets and shelves,
sharp corners
where flourescent light echoes like darts
off walls, white coats, the table
where my skin sticks to paper sheets.
Cold stainless steel pierces my feet,
freezes the dark place between my legs,
the black holes in my eyes
that shrink from bright walls,
expand and contract
as if sucked in and out
of my body.
Underneath it all the drone of the words,
"Yes relax sorry we know it hurts
a few minutes more and it will be gone..."

The white walls blurr soft as gauze,
then shrink down and split apart
into thousands of pieces,
like rows and rows of tiny crosses
growing up small and white,
a thousand little angels ready to explode
of their own brightness,
or pinpricks surfacing from the pavement
like air bubbles from fish
deep in ponds, and I know your space,
know it for its breathing,
for its colors newly blown
and ready to burst, and I wish
I had remembered to bring flowers,
wild dandelions I'd toss you,
floating like lily pads--
some last good-bye or lullaby
as I danced among you all like a mad woman,
barefoot, war painted, tangled jungle hair
still damp from rain-spilled alleyways,
butcher's blood, strange alchemy
sucking bones into mud.

In my dream I wake up
and find you rocking away the stones
from your own grave.
Please, child, hush
and sleep away all the not-knowing
of eye color and head shape,
sleep the roses from your cheeks,
the fuzzy leaf buddings of hair roots
and wild light glowing hands,
sleep, please
your never-breath, burning
holes in this hollow womb,
the shapes of flower petals,
the sizes of small fists.





The Jetty

Yesterday, on Assateague, we walked
from the road into the bayberry trees,
and talked. She told me about taking
her son to the top of a sand dune
named Jockey's Ridge, how everything
seemed like slow motion then when
they ran down those slopes, sinking
in sand to their knees. And when
we were far enough in and could
see nothing through the trees
that surrounded us, when the

afternoon sun gave its first hints
of failing, her shawl pulled tight
on her shoulders, I remembered a piece
of something, remembered the fear
of the scoldings my mother would give
as she picked ticks and thorns from
our clothes when my brother and I
returned at dusk, and the fear
of never finding our way out of those
woods we played in. Yesterday, I turned

to look once, and saw the sand
had allowed no trace of our footsteps.
But the island is different from this jetty,
rocks strung out into the Atlantic
to stop the shore from the
movement it knows instinctively.
She says when it rains in Takoma Park
the cars outside her window, on Erie Street,
sound like the ocean, and I hear this

as I watch the way the waves cut at
each chunk of granite, and the swaying
of seaweed in circular currents, and I
am still in the sound of this motion.
I heard this as we talked last night
about the bones we found on the dunes
at Assateague, the skeleton of some
small animal we could not recognize.
We pointed with a stalk of sea oats

pulled from the sand, made guesses,
but could agree on nothing more than
whatever it was, it was alive there once,
as we were. Or maybe it was in
the movement of her hand smoothing
cream on her face, red from the
late winter sun, how I watched her
watching herself in the mirror,
and how, when she finished, she drew in
one long breath, and turned.

Woodpile

Elaine is chopping wood off to the side
of the gravel road that leads to the cabin.
Somewhere on the mountain someone
is shooting at beer cans, and out on the deck
Ed is playing *Study in A Minor* on the guitar,
over and over, guiltily shrugging
at each missed note, like my father would,
as though the possibility of the music itself
were watching over, and frowning.

She stacks the wood methodically,
digs to the bottom and pulls pieces
straight, aware how the total's changed
with each added fragment, and knows
that the heat of this day when the sun
browned her skin and the sweat gathered
where her limbs come together will return,
tame and changed, in winter, with the pieces
pulled off, burned slowly.

Advice From Home

Lorraine's father
5 foot 1
a little man
a tough man
with heavy fists
down to his knees

a master brassiere salesman
with the midwest territory
for breasts of all sizes

Lorraine's father
master brassiere salesman
to a flat-chested girl
and her mother likewise
providing hammocks
for all the swinging breasts
in the flat middle-west

they knew him in Iowa,
Ohio, Nebraska and Topeka
and weekends he'd come home,
drinking coffee in little sips
he'd counsel us
"Girls, never trust a man
with tight thin lips."

Cloudy

Whenever it's drizzly and humid outside, the apartment smells like damp wool.

Jack and Rose rent the top floor of a renovated house on Federal Hill, overlooking the Baltimore harbor. On rainy days, the fog encircles their apartment and it hardly looks as if the top floor exists. On these days, neither Jack nor Rose can see anything but cloudiness outside their windows. On these days, they feel as though they're stuck in the cabin of a jumbo jet, glopping through sticky marshmallow clouds.

"Jack? Breakfast." Rose removes the old copper teapot from the flame. She opens two packages of instant Cream of Wheat and pours them into her hands. She lets the cereal sift through her fingers like sand. They are in a beach cottage and she hears a foghorn in the distance. She smells salt water and licks her chapped lips. As she reaches for the kettle, Rose knocks the salt shaker in the sink.

"Are you coming or aren't you? I won't pour until I see you." Rose waits, counting backwards from ten, predicting he'll appear when she reaches five. At five, Jack appears. He is fully dressed in navy trousers and an Orioles jersey. A grey fedora, his favorite in their collection, rests atop his bald head. A single tuft of fuzzy silver hair remains above his left ear, as if years of wearing hats cocked to one side has pushed all the hair over to one spot, where it rooted and grew thicker and thicker, leaving the rest of his head smooth, now slightly sagging.

"What are we having?" Same question as yesterday and the day before. Jack eyes the red and white packages and the black man smiling on the front of the box. Jack stares into his laughing eyes and turns the box over, finding the same picture on the other side. He replaces the box in the pantry and sighs. Jack's shoulders and knees ache, like they always do on damp mornings. It's not me, it's the altitude, he insists. So damn high I get nosebleeds at night.

"And good morning to you too, dear. My, don't you look pleasant, this fine morning. You even pulled up your fly."

"That wheat stuff again, I should've known. Why do you make me

eat something that causes me to sit on the toilet all morning?"

"Oh, and you left that nice spittle dried up on your chin for me to admire. Please, so sit across from me today." Rose pours boiling water into each cereal bowl. Then she adds milk and stirs. It comes out just right, not lumpy but not watery either. She smiles before turning around.

"Just the way you like it. And here's your part of the paper." Rose eyes her husband tentatively, debating whether or not to ask him how he feels. She decides against it, knowing she'll hear an expose about the altitude. Jack chose this apartment above the others they'd looked at because it overlooked the old rug shop. It was where they bought the green rug, their first purchase as husband and wife, paid for in cash on the very same day they married. They both liked it so much right from the start, and no matter what their furniture looked like, what the colors of the walls were or the wallpaper print, Jack and Rose always made the green wool rug from Barney's Rugs a showpiece in their living room. It would be 45 years old in two days.

"What are you looking at?" Jack peers at his wife suspiciously, wondering why she's not rattling on about this or that. "I wiped my chin, didn't I? You saw me."

"It's not that. I was just thinking about the rug, about how old it is. Maybe we should get a new one, something with different colors in it, something fresh. We could get it today, take one of those new trolleys up to Howard Street and shop together. We could stop in the Market for lunch, eat one of Martha's corned beef sandwiches on fresh pumpernickel and a nice fat pickle." Rose's speech is hurried, excited, and her eyes shine. She stares out the small kitchen window, squinting at the gray sky.

"I don't know what you're talking about. Today's Wednesday. We have to clean. Besides, I asked you for honey, do you know where it is? You didn't even see me get up to look for it."

"Honey?" Rose's heart leaps. Honey? Jack never asks for honey to put in his cereal. Rose offers it daily. But she forgot this morning, and he remembered. For a second, she stares at him, and tears wet her eyes. He wants honey today, of all days, when she forgets to offer it. And he asked for the honey all by himself. Rose breathes deeply, composing herself.

"You really want honey?" she asks, trying to sound nonchalant.

Jack has already caught her, though. He knew it when she jerked her head toward him and stared at him with disbelief. "Of course I do. Why

would I ask if I didn't want? Do I look like a man with a motive? I just think that today, honey would be a fine addition to this fine meal. If you don't want me to have it, I won't. I'll eat it plain."

They are silent. The radiator whistles softly, trying to pierce the cloud of tension between them. Drops of water tup-tup in the bathroom sink, descending in pairs at three-second intervals. They both know that the washer on the faucet needs to be replaced. Jack and Rose are silent and they stare at each other. They hang in single are suspension from the same jungle gym bar, monkeys wondering what to do next. An ambulance, siren wailing, suddenly passes in front of their building and they both jump back, startled.

"You want honey, I'll find you some honey," Rose mumbles, shaking her head and patting the hair down on top of her head.

Never mind, never mind. I was just joking. Sit down and eat. Here's your part of the paper."

Rose sits and eats and reads her part of the paper, the front section. She eats a spoonful of cereal then adds a spoonful of sugar to the rest. After every bite, Rose adds more sugar. At the bottom of the bowl is a sugarbed with a small ocean of milk floating on top. She lifts the bowl to her mouth and slurps out the milk, sticking her tongue out as fa as it will go to lick the sugar from the bottom of the bowl. Then she scrapes out the remainder with her spoon. She pushes back her chair and stands up, savoring the last morsels of sugar stuck to her tongue and teeth and roof of her mouth.

"I don't know about you, old boy, but I'm still hungry. Want another package, Jack?" Jack grumbles, "I'll pass." Rose walks to the stove and relight the pilot. She sneaks a look at Jack's bowl. He hasn't eaten any of the cereal. Rose almost offers him some honey, then she remembers what just happened. She turns toward the stove. Whatever you fix, I'll eat, Rosie. If you fix it, it has to be good. Even if you just open the can. She'd laughed then, knowing that was the extent of her cooking skill. Now, when she thinks about it, so many years later, it seems a cruel thing to say, a simple endearing sentence stinging with cruelty. She allows the kettle to whistle furiously before removing it from the flame, just as Jack pushes back his chair forcefully and stands up to turn off the flame himself. "Thank you dear, but I've got it. Sit down and finish eating," she says, not even glancing over her shoulder.

* * *

Rose glances at the digital clock. 9:47. She has 58 minutes before it's time to leave for school. The first lunch shift starts at 11:05 and it takes three minutes to walk to the bus and eight minutes to reach Cross Street Elementary. It's also Wednesday, cleaning day. Rose sits at her dressing table. She places a green net on her head, tucking in loose clumps of her rather colorless hair. Her cloudy blue eyes stare back at her in the mirror. Rose walks to the bureau and takes out her flowered housecoat. Jack had embroidered "ROSE" on the front pocket years ago and given the smock to her as an anniversary present. It has a long zipper up the front and lace trim around the Peter Pan collar.

"You ready, Rosie? I've taken everything out and left yours in the hallway," Jack yells from the bathroom, a childlike excitement penetrating his words. Rose and Jack share chores. Rose hates the bathroom, Jack loves it. He uses a toothbrush on the bathtub tiles, shaking a little Comet onto the brush, wetting it, and scrubbing out the mold, first side to side then up and down. He rests on his knees on sponges as he stoops in the tub. He says it helps his arthritis, but his knees bruise anyway because there's always water on the floor of the tub which the sponges soak up, so there is really no padding at all. Jack says he doesn't mind, though, that he cuts his cleaning time in half because the wet sponges are ready for the sink. Just a little more Comet and my work is almost done, he boast.

While Jack cleans the tub, Rose vacuums the bedroom floor. It's a fine wood floor. The floor attachment is always clogged with dustballs and hair, but Rose never pulls out the dirt before she begins. She vacuums around socks and books and newspapers and plant leaves, and whatever the vacuum doesn't pick up she pushes under the bed. Whatever is left, she stoops down on her knees to pick up by hand.

"What did we buy a nice vacuum cleaner for if you're going to do it by hand anyway?" Jack asks, catching her in the act.

"It's an old machine, Jack, you should know about such things. It can't pick up too much. You know, they have liquid cleaner you can just squirt between the tiles so you don't have to scrub." Jack retreats into the bathroom and Rose hears furious scrubbing.

"We like the smell of Comet, remember?"

At 10:20, Rose switches to the rug attachment and pushes the vacuum into the living room. On her way, she grabs the Comet from the toilet seat. The green rug desperately needs to be cleaned. Ashes from Jack's cigar and threads from his sewing litter the rug's surface, a pile of filth collected over the week and left untouched by both Jack and

Rose. Jack likes to let things stay dirty; he says he feels a real sense of accomplishment when everything really looks and smells clean. Rose notices a snag in the oval-shaped rug, noting the place so the vacuum doesn't stick and pull out yarns. She plugs in the cord and turns on the machine. Rose loves the vacuum because she can sing loudly above the noise. She feels relaxed after the cleaning ritual. The rug is five shades of green, darker to lighter from the edge to the inside.

Rose begins at the outer oval, marching behind the machine, going over each oval twice. So much dirt on the tattered rug, and still he refuses to get rid of it. The only reason it's lasted so long is that they never had children. They'd have had a new rug, two or three new ones by now, if there had been children running across the rug, playing on the rug, spilling things that don't ever wash out. Rose stops. She stands, armed with the machine running on high speed, thinking about the children she and Jack never had. Out of the corner of one eye, she sees the silver spoons hanging on a paneled wall above the rolltop desk. Eighteen spoons. The school started giving her spoons each year starting eighteen years ago, and she'd hung up every one of them.

If she had a child it would be an adult now. Instead, her children always stay young. Rose the lunch lady, the old lady who eats with the children and bangs a spoon on the long table, calling for order and quiet at the end of each half hour lunch period. Rose, Grandma Rose, they started calling her ten years ago. She used to be Aunt Rose, then her skin began to loosen and spots dotted her hands. The plaques holding the silver spoons read "Thank you, Rose, for making lunch so special." Always in quotes, as if each kid said this itself.

"Rose, watch what you're doing! You crazy or something—turn the thing off, for godsake." Jack is behind Rose, yelling in her ear, and she doesn't even turn around. He grabs the handle from her and turns off the machine. The rug is snagged, Rose has hit the snag, the spot she has been so careful to avoid. The rug has a fresh hole in it.

"It's ruined. You did this on purpose? To torment me? The rug is almost 45 years old."

"45 years," Rose repeats softly. The water tup-tups in the sink. Jack has cleaned the sink but he never bothers with the washer. "Jack, how come, how come we never had a child? If we had a child, you know we'd have bought a new rug a long time ago, maybe two or three new ones."

"I was never against a child, Rose. I thought you never wanted one," Jack replies, staring at the silver spoons. "You should have told me, you

just should have said something."

"Never against it? You were never against it?" Rose echoes his words, spaced like the water drops. She turns around and rips off her hair net. "I have to leave. I'll be late for the first shift. They need me."

Jack's eyes are wet. His eyes move from the rug to the spoons to the hairnet at his feet. "Could I come with you Rosie? I'd like to come with you today, what do you think?"

Rose stops at the door, holding it open with her back turned to her husband. "You'd better finish the rug, Jack. I'll be back to make you lunch—you pick out a can of soup. But you'd better finish the rug first. I didn't have time to do it. It's mostly your dirt anyway."

Jack doesn't hear her. He's already shaking out more Comet and warming up the machine.





Green



Parade



Parade II

A Woman

A woman knows.
You have heard this before.
A woman knows in her bones.
In her silence there are no words,
her body is a scar,
taught long years the art of keeping quiet in her body.
A woman keeps her own company.
She does not ask for her self.
In the absence she gathers knowledge.
Her thinking becomes fluid like water bending around rock,
and she is called intuitive.
In silence, in her own company,
she can see what is coming like a storm on the air.
And she is called wise.
She holds terror in her breast, the breast that feeds,
the breast that is a pillow.
A woman does not speak her rage,
she fears the wailing in her would not stop.
She sees annihilation in her rage.
A woman is in the wordless place of her body.
Her body is a silent ache.

Grocery Store

There is a man in the grocery line
with a basket full of cans all
single serving size—peas, fruit
and soup for one.

He turns these out onto the counter,
arranges them by type into even rows
of green and red labels.

He has noticed the woman who stands in front of him,
her long hair shining under the fluorescents.

She is buying red grapes, cat food and pantyhose.

He fingers a magazine,
begins to lean forward slowly
until he is very close to the woman.

He inhales, catching the scent of her
his face near her back.

He raises his hand to fondle the hair
at the place where it ends between her shoulder blades,
so softly she doesn't notice this touching.

He stands with eyes half closed and breathes.

To my husband who left me

You are like a part of my bone gone,
piece of me displaced, dislocated,
loss beyond loss, separate.

Language is inchoate.

Come back. Come back. My grief
is a wail, inappropriate, uncivilized,
it is not done, but I do it.

You are like skin flailed,
currycombed, and sown with salt,
pain beyond pain, extreme.

Behind this is clarity,
unfamiliar, coherent.

Come back. Come back. My love
is not done, and yet I lose it.

Day

The sound the water made was quiet,
Quiet as your sleep,
As the light deepened through the window,
And I didn't want to wake you,

Or tell you that it was still raining.
The light was a cloudy dark,
Like the puddles, slate grey. We had watched the rain
Before, leaning back in our chairs against the house.

Then you turned in your sleep like something
Falling away, loose tile,
Like the place where our bodies end,
Where there is no light or wind.

So I went out front to feel the air move,
And watched the driveway that had become a pond.
A bird flew by, looking down at your sleep,
At the white sky there, the smooth wheat colored stones.

Maple Trees On A Path At The Golf Course

It still lives.
It still reaches up over the path
Taller than the other trees
Though the upper-half has been torn down.
It must have fallen in a storm

Or a strong wind.
There is no burnt wooden scar
On the frayed ends,
Nothing to tell its story,
And the part that fell, fell heavy

Like a cradle,
Caught in the limbs of another tree
That has grown out of the side
Of the larger one.
The slender tree holds the thrown fragment

As it has for months.
Together, they are like stone,
Like a pieta.
And the torn branches are strong
And reach to the ground. They pin down

A smaller tree, that has grown beneath the heavy weight,
Or has been trapped there,
Curved in an arc.
It lives facing the ground
Though its leaves have begun to grow

Towards the light.
And soon the branches will grow upward,
Until it grows above the part that has fallen.
But now it is young and lives like a nest
Around a soft room of air.

In its capture,
A solitude is created.
Like grief, like a worn glove.

